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**IMPROVING HOW LISTENING SKILLS ARE TAUGHT  
IN THE EFL CLASSROOM:**

**GUIDELINES TO PRODUCING BETTER SPEAKERS OF THE ENGLISH  
LANGUAGE**

**BACHARELATO IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING**

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**INSTITUTO SUPERIOR DE EDUCAÇÃO**  
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**CLASSROOM:**

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**LANGUAGE**

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ARE TAUGHT IN THE EFL CLASSROOM: GUIDELINES TO PRODUCING  
BETTER SPEAKERS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE***

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my deceased father **Pedro Andrade** and my beloved mother **Cândida Andrade** for having shown their sons and daughters the real spirit of sacrifice and respect that makes us be honoured people. We are proud of this!

This work is also dedicated to my five brothers and three sisters for our union and reciprocal love. I am proud of this!

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**ABSTRACT**

This research paper is concerned with the need to improve how listening skills are taught in the Capeverdian EFL classroom. Teaching English through listening is not an easy task, especially when there are many factors that impede the learning process such as: lack of adequate materials and conditions; lack of qualified teachers with good pronunciation, and lack of innovative approaches to teaching listening skills. If our goal as teachers is to produce good English speakers we must invest in training good listeners. In this work I will focus on the following aspects: an evaluation of how effectively listening skills are taught in the Capeverdian EFL classroom; a look at how we can turn teaching problems into positive solutions; how to improve teaching listening skills and materials and recommendations for best practices in teaching listening skills in the EFL classroom. In conclusion I will include listening activities which reflect these best practices and offer recommendations for further research.



## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Why Is Listening Important?**

People who speak well normally listen well. If this is true, the key to speaking well is learning how to listen effectively. Listening is a fundamental skill in language acquisition. It is an important skill because it is how we naturally learn a language. We as children hear words, see gestures and formulate vocabulary in a social context from those around us. Thus we begin to learn our first language by repeating what we hear others say. Littlewood (1984) states that: “The child imitates the sounds and patterns which he hears around him (5).” This close relationship between listening (a receptive skill) and speaking (a productive skill) is what produces verbal expression.

When I was a secondary school student, in the late eighties, I learned English by reading and writing, but this did not help me become a good speaker of the language. Though I was a good reader, I had many problems with pronunciation and listening comprehension. Now, as an English teacher, I realize that listening is a complementary skill to speaking and therefore it is important to stress listening when teaching English if students are to become good speakers. In essence if students are to become good speakers, they should be trained to become good listeners first.

Listening skills become even more important in a multi- cultural society. As in Cape Verde, there are many languages spoken as a result of open borders. English as a global language is taught in the secondary schools. From a grammar-based teaching methodology, only in the last two decades has greater attention been given to communicative approaches to language acquisition as per the 1990 curriculum revision. In order for students to get the most out of the communicative learning process they must have effective listening skills.

For many reasons, teachers still face problems in effectively teaching listening skills. These constraints include: lack of innovative methodology, equipment and materials; teachers who lack strong skills in teaching listening comprehension and the lack of student motivation. In

addition, the school environment is not always conducive to teaching listening skills, i.e. noise factor, room set up etc.

It is important to point out that over the years I have seen much improvement in how listening skills are taught, however we still have much to do before it is taught effectively. In light of this, this paper defends the argument that listening skills should be taught more effectively in the EFL classroom in order to produce better English language speakers.

In my research paper I will focus on the importance of improving how listening skills are taught and recommend effective strategies and techniques to do this. Based on a survey applied in five urban and semi-urban secondary schools in Praia and in addition to my own experience and observations my objectives are to:

- Identify problems in teaching English skills in the Capeverdian EFL classroom;
- Evaluate why these constraints are present and give strategies to overcome them; and
- Recommend specific designs for creative and doable listening activities specifically for third cycle students.

## **1– The Concept of Listening**

Listening is one of the four fundamental skills through which a language is taught. It is one of the two skills that we use when communicating orally. According to Rost (1991) “Listening is an active process requiring participation on the part of the listener (21).” For example when someone listens to a speaker, he/she processes the information mentally in order to construct an answer. During the listening process the listener is actively engaged.

In learning a foreign language, it is important to listen to what is transmitted with a great deal of attention because this helps the listener to reproduce exactly, or almost exactly, what he/she hears. Therefore listening is not an isolated skill; we listen in order to understand what has been heard. Moreover the speaker and the listener must be interacting in a social context. According to Larsen- Freeman (1986) “It is through interaction between speaker and listener that meaning becomes clear (123).” This clarity suggests an understanding of what has been heard.

The responsibility of being understood is two fold: 1- This responsibility falls on the speaker who needs to actively involve the listener. This may include speaking with the help of gestures or other aids; 2- The responsibility of the listener would then be to listen actively. This entails paying attention to the pronunciation, the tone of voice, the grammatical structure and body language- when he/she is interacting face-to-face. Therefore the teacher must create adequate and contextual situations to fully and actively engage the student/ listener.

But what is active listening? Active listening is the act of having the listener take part in the communication process. The listener focuses his/her attention on what the speaker is saying to confirm understanding. It is necessary that while listening the listener has an engaged attitude, that is, he/she has to involve him/herself in communication to assure the speaker that he/she is attentive to what is said. This also demonstrates some interest to the speaker in order to encourage him/her to speak. In the classroom teachers should pay attention to

students if they want them to be active listeners. Brown (1990) believes that if students do not play an active role “this leads rapidly to boredom on their part and often, failure to learn much from the class (171).”

### 1.1- Defining Listening

Listening is the ability to hear attentively and to understand what others are saying. When we define listening it is necessary to consider listening components such as: understanding of the accent; the way words are pronounced; grammar rules; and learning vocabulary which helps us to understand the whole meaning of what the emitter is saying in context. Effective listening depends entirely on the relationship between these components. A disconnection amongst these factors would make listening less effective. If one listens to a certain message he/she must combine such factors in context to more accurately react to what he/she is listening to. Harmer (1983) states that “What a good listener is able to do is to process what he hears on the basis of the context it occurs in (15).”

Students need to be taught strategies in deciphering different accents and the importance of idioms and jargon including speech rhythms which will enable them to listen to the various styles of spoken English be it in conversation with a native speaker from the Anglophone Diaspora, listening to song lyrics or watching films. Willis (1981) states that:” Students need to learn how to listen, and to get the chance to listen to different types of English, so they will be able to listen with understanding to spoken English outside the classroom (135).”

The way words are pronounced also has implications on language comprehension because the listener should be able to discriminate the different sounds he/she hears. This ability is necessary given that there are words that have similar pronunciation. As students listen to words they create mental pictures. If they can not correctly discriminate sounds of the words they hear, their mental images will be incorrect and they will formulate either a confused or wrong meaning of the message. For example the pair *live / leave* in the sentences below

- I live in Achadinha. / I leave in Achadinha.
- I leave at 7:00 to go to school. / I live at 7:00.

Grammar rules were mentioned above as a factor of listening. But why is grammar important? In first language acquisition a child acquires language mainly from repetition and in an informal way. As the child grows he/she starts to use language in a formal way and at school is given a set of rules to express thoughts that are grammatically correct. When

students learn a second or third language they are confronted with how they have formally learned language and hold the newly acquired language to grammar scrutiny. The second/ third language learner is duly influenced by formal language learning and therefore makes constant reference to grammar points.

Learning vocabulary is also helpful when listening for comprehension because the listener will not be able to participate in a conversation if he/she does not know the words that he/she is listening to. Learning includes the knowledge of words like homonyms, homographs and homophones. Homonyms are words that have both the same sound and spelling but are different in meaning, e.g.: “*bear*” (noun) and “*bear*” (verb); homographs are words that have the same spelling but different in meaning, grammar or pronunciation, e.g.: “record” (noun) and “record” (verb) – the stressed syllables are underlined; homophones are words with the same sound but different in spelling and meaning, e.g.: “knew” (verb) and “new” (adjective). According to Krashen and Terrell (1988) “...comprehensibility is dependent directly on the ability to recognize the meaning of key elements in an utterance (155).”

## **1.2 – Listening as a Training Skill**

It would be hard to train students in the English language without listening skills because to repeat words we need to hear them first. We learn after repeating what we hear. Outside the classroom infants have a more favourable environment to help them in language acquisition beyond their mothers influence; even toy manufacturers are aware of the value of small children imitating sounds that they hear. In the classroom where English is taught in a controlled way, students have more difficulties in learning the language, especially if teachers do not teach it through listening skills. When this does not take place students have problems in expressing the language verbally. It is important to acknowledge that spoken English is closely related to listening skills. In addition pronunciation will probably be the most important issue in English language teaching when the aim is to produce good speakers of the language. According to Rixon (1986) “One of the most obvious sources of difficulty for a learner of English is the way in which it is pronounced (37).”

When we train to produce language, listening is of primary importance and it must be given special attention. To learn a language orally it is necessary to master not only pronunciation but also intonation, stress, and sound discrimination in order to produce it with a high level of accuracy. However it is also important that the listener listens in context because the context, according to Rixon (1986) usually helps learners distinguish between similar

sounding words when they form part of a whole utterance (41).” Therefore, the productive skills depend greatly on listening. Littlewood, for example, (1981) writes that most learners will spend considerably more time in listening to the foreign language than in producing it themselves (65).

In order to teach English as a foreign language through listening, the teacher should provide learners with specific learning tools that allow them to develop accuracy. These learning tools can be developed through listening and speaking activities such as dialogues (that imply role- playing), songs, lectures, radio broadcasts, reports etc. The latter three are more suited for advanced learners. Brown (1977) points out that: “One of the ways a teacher can help his or her students in understanding a foreign language is to help them find their way around the sounds of the foreign language...(2).” These listening tools are fundamental to students learning through listening. It is necessary to practice activities in the classroom according to the student’s level. When the teacher chooses activities that are appropriate to the student’s level, training will become more effective. Therefore, however difficult it is for teachers to teach English through listening skills, with all of its constraints, it is hard to teach English without teaching listening skills. This demonstrates to us the idea that listening is fundamental in languages learning.

### **1.3- Listening Skills Specific to ELT**

Listening skills are important in the training of most subjects but now I will focus on language. The reason for this is that listening is the first receptive skill that helps students learn language skills. When we teach English as a foreign language we have to tackle some constraints to make listening skills more accessible to students. These constraints are: mother tongue interference, lack of adequate vocabulary and student’s lack of understanding of what is heard.

The mother tongue interferes in the following circumstance: When teaching an EFL class student whose mother tongue is Creole is simultaneously and maybe unconsciously translating Creole to English. If the grammatical structure is very different the student may become completely blocked. According to Littlewood (1984) “...the highest level of difficulty occurs when there is no choice at all in the learner’s mother tongue but an obligatory choice in the second language (18).” This constraint influences the student’s way of thinking in English because every time he has to say anything the first language that comes to his/her mind is Creole. Byrne (1988) states that “... if we are listening to

something in our mother tongue, understanding normally seems effortless! (13),” but when listening to a foreign language “... the learners have considerable difficulties to face. In the early stages, they may still be mastering basic phonological and grammatical patterns as well as vocabulary, all of which the native speaker understands so effortlessly (14).”

Another constraint that teachers should take into consideration is the lack of adequate vocabulary. Vocabulary is a basic element in communication. We acquire morphology and syntax because we understand the meaning of what we hear and this is possible thanks to vocabulary. Krashen and Terrel (1988) point out that “If acquirers do not recognize the meanings of the key words used by those who address them, they will be unable to participate in the conversation (155).” So students need to acquire vocabulary that should be taught in context as well as teachers should develop strategies to help students expand their vocabulary. We acquire new words when we hear them in phrases or sentences. Teacher can make students expand vocabulary by preparing exercises with prefixes and suffixes. For prefixes teacher can give examples like the ones that follow: *happy – unhappy; advantage – disadvantage; patient – impatient; write – rewrite. For suffixes: *happy – happiness; advantage – advantageous; patient – patiently; read – reading; mean- meaning – meaningful.**

When we use prefixes or suffixes we change adjectives into nouns, adjectives into adverbs, verbs into gerunds or nouns or adjectives and words into antonyms.

All of the above researchers agree that the student’s lack of understanding of what he/she hears contributes to the failure to learn a foreign language. A good understanding entails knowledge of pronunciation in order to decipher the words the speaker utters. Most teachers are concerned with helping students to understand the general meaning of what is heard, even if they do not understand all the words. Many students get worried once they do not understand enough words to be confident about the overall meaning. Gebhard (1996) states that “...if the language used by the teacher or in materials is not comprehensible, students can lose interest, become anxious or frustrated, and sometimes go into a passive, nonattentive mood (80).” Now that we better understand the importance of listening skills, we will discuss the major problems faced when teaching listening.

## **2– Major Problems in Teaching Listening: Why They Exist and How to Solve Them**

Problems are not always bad and most of the time they are useful. When we are faced with problems we tend to see them as trouble, however problems also have the effect of helping us to analyze a situation from different perspectives in order to search for a solution. The same is true when we study a language. The language learning process involves challenges for non- native speakers which can only be solved with practice. It is also important that teachers develop creative approaches to language learning that simulate first language acquisition skills which produce fluency and correct application via effective listening. Teaching English through listening can be a difficult task if the teacher can not create the appropriate environment; does not have the proper materials and equipments; if his/ her level of self-confidence is low; or if there is no student's cooperation. This chapter will focus on some of the major problems EFL teachers face in the classroom and how to resolve them.

### **2.1- Classroom environment**

Problems arise when the classroom environment is inappropriate and/or the room's acoustics are bad. The class will only be successful if there are good conditions inside and outside of the classroom. It is difficult to teach listening in a noisy environment. The noise inside the classroom normally happens when the teacher can not control the class. Listening activities are hard to understand if the sound is not good. In Capeverdian schools the classes are normally large, so it is imperative for the teacher to be creative in adapting the classroom environment to his/her needs. This can be done by sensitizing students for the activity, giving activities that may involve everybody, setting group work and raising the volume of the sound. Other times the classroom environment is affected by the external noise from



students in the hallways, wind, cars or factories. In this case the teacher can close the front windows or move to a room where there is less noise.

## **2.2- Equipment**

The lack of appropriate listening equipment like: tape recorders, cassettes, CD players, television, films and radio compounds the problem of providing students with an authentic listening experience. From my studies held in five secondary schools in Praia when asked if their schools provide audio equipment, more teachers than not answered negatively. Such a problem has a negative impact on how well we teach. Further, when equipment is available it often does not work well. For example, the sound system does not have a good sound for the classroom size, there is an electricity problem or the tape itself unravels.

In order to have good listening classes we need adequate audio equipment. According to Yagang (1993) “Unclear sounds resulting from poor-quality equipment can interfere with the listener’s comprehension (17).” When the school does not supply the equipment teachers find themselves in the position of buying or bringing them from home. From the studies that I conducted with teachers, they stated that when the school does not provide the equipment, it is borrowed, made or bought at their expense. This is not sustainable. They also answered that if they have no equipment they have to use their own voice. This is a natural way of solving the problem only if the teacher has good pronunciation. If he/she selects a dialogue or a poem to be taught, he/she can use his/her own voice as a resource.

If the selected activity is a song, he/she can use his/her voice to sing it, but it is necessary that he/she invites someone who can play an acoustic guitar. So, the sound of the guitar may get the students interested in the teacher singing. Survey results showed that students like to listen to music in the class. Celce-Murcia and Hilles(1988) demonstrate that “It has been our experience that songs and poetry in the ESL classroom can revive our love and respect for English and can bring to mind again the joy and exquisite beauty of the language we have chosen to teach (116).” The teacher also must have loud voice that can be heard throughout the classroom. Because energy can be cut without warning, teacher must always be prepared with a supply of batteries.

## **2.3- Student’s Motivation and Interest**

Other factors that can negatively affect a listening class are student's low motivation and lack of interest. If we want to develop listening and speaking that are complementary skills, it is incumbent on teachers to develop motivation and interest in the students. These two elements are determinant and they seem to have a strong influence in the success or failure in language learning. There is a close relationship between motivation and interest. Motivation is something that encourages the student to achieve a certain goal and interest is the desire the student has to give attention to something. Motivation and interest are important in language learning and when student is learning listening comprehension he/she must be stimulated. Ur (1984) says that: "...we must try to avoid boring or over-theoretical subjects, using as far as possible ones we think our students may be interested in, that seem of practical relevance, that may arouse or stimulate them (27)." Often the student is not motivated because the topic is irrelevant; the activity is not appropriate to the student's level; or the content of the class is not related to student's reality. When any of these constraints occurs the student may not feel interested, i.e., he/she may not pay attention to the class and consequently, he/she will not participate in class. According to Byrne(1988) "...sometimes the length of time we are required to listen for, without participating, may cause memory problems or even fatigue, so that in the end we simply no longer listen with understanding (13)." Therefore a teacher who wants the student to be motivated and interested in a listening class should select activities that are attractive, give him/her a purpose for listening, and chose topics according to his/her school level and reality. All of this is interesting to the student and positive to the teacher too. Rixon (1986) points out that: "Using interesting passages and doing the right sort of exercises in a coherent sequence are essential to a successful lesson... (74)."

## **2.4- Teacher's Capacity and Level of Confidence**

The teacher's capacity and level of confidence are of great importance as well when giving a listening class. A teacher should be able to sufficiently dominate what he/she has to teach and have a certain level of self-confidence to perform the class. There are teachers who do not have enough capacity to teach listening skills and this implies a low level of self-confidence on their part. Most of the time this problem exists because the teacher is not trained, or the training is not adequate to the level taught, or, even, he/she does not have enough practice in teaching this type of skills. If teachers do not have the required abilities to conduct the class, it will be frustrating for him/her. In order to prevent this it is necessary

that the teacher prepares him/herself in advance by studying each aspect of the lesson conveniently, asking for the help of colleagues, suggesting model classes during coordination meetings, and applying for training to teach all school levels. All of these suggestions may contribute to raise his/her level of confidence. Since teachers know that these problems exist, it is our duty to work toward their solution. But the solution will depend a lot on the listening skills materials.

### **3 – Listening Skills Materials**

Listening skills materials are materials such as films, music, recorded texts, etc. They are important for listening classes because they help the teacher when it is necessary to present language in a different way. In listening practice the teacher should prepare materials he/she thinks are suitable to achieve the aims of the lesson. We should not disregard the fact that listening materials have not only advantages but also disadvantages. In this chapter I will discuss: the different types of listening materials; how to select authentic listening materials; how to use these materials in class, and how to conserve and maintain them.

#### **3.1 – Types of Listening Materials**

It is important to exemplify the types of listening products or materials when we talk about listening. The first product is the human voice, the second product is audio material and the third is video equipment. Speech is the most reliable material because it happens in the most natural way. It is through speech that the teacher gives student language learning activities like explanations, instructions and comprehension questions, but you can see this is not enough for a student who is intended to be a good listener. It is also through speech that student interacts with others inside and outside the classroom. While interacting through spontaneous speech, the student shows understanding or lack of it through expression, gesture, or simply by speaking to ask for clarification. Although it may be a most reliable material, it is also important to remember that the human voice is not appropriate for all listening activities. To a certain extent speech may bring any disadvantage if it is spontaneous and contains some authenticity. Yagang (1993 “In spontaneous conversations

people sometimes use ungrammatical sentences because of nervousness or hesitation. This may make it difficult for the listener to understand the meaning (16).” Spontaneous and authentic speech does not give the student the kind of practice needed for listening comprehension if it just happens in the classroom and, because they are not native speakers.

The second type of listening material is audio. Audio material is a way that substitutes the teacher’s speech because teaching listening just using one’s own voice would be extremely difficult and monotonous for students. Audio material contains the native speaker’s voice and this is better for a student who is learning English as a foreign language. Recorded material has some advantages: it allows the teacher to bring the voices of native speakers into the classroom and to present a variety of voices and accents; the teacher or student can stop the tape and repeat any part of a conversation that may not have been understood; the student has the chance to use this material outside the classroom. As speech does, the recorded material or the tape recorder also may present disadvantage while it is being used. As Harmer (1983) states “In the first place it is not always a very good machine and the tapes are sometimes less than totally clear. People speaking on audio tape cannot be seen, and yet much of what we hear in real life takes place with the speaker being present (177).”

Another type of material is video. Compared to audio material, video seems to be better because, despite the advantages audio material offers, the student can see the people speaking and through their gestures, facial and body expression, he understands better what is being said. This type of material can provide some useful comprehension practice just for advanced students. On the other hand video- tapes have their disadvantages. For example not all tapes and recorders are of good quality, and then there is the possibility of sound distortion that affects the student’s understanding of a passage.

### **3.2 – Selecting Authentic Listening Materials**

In this section I will focus the authentic materials. As language users we are exposed to a variety of listening materials that are used as a part of communication. Authentic materials are those that are designed for native speakers. This includes: films, TV commercials, cartoons, news, comedy shows, dramas, and soap operas; radio news, dramas and ads, audio taped short stories; pop and rock music, documentaries, etc. An English newspaper and even an English radio program are examples of authentic English. It is not easy to teach English at first through authentic materials if for but one reason; there is no translations or subtitles. The teacher should select material according to the aims he/she intends to achieve and the

student's interest. According to Ur (1984) "Some authentic material can of course be adapted for classroom use, but usually only after careful selection and editing (23)."

The selection of authentic listening material should be made according to students' level and needs. When student is at the beginning levels, first cycle, the material and activities should be simple and gradually they are made complex as student progresses to advanced levels or third cycle. Learning English through authentic materials creates difficulties for students. Such materials are best used if we introduce them slowly and allow for students to gradually get used to them.

### **3.3 – Using Listening Materials in Class**

When we discuss listening materials it is necessary to think of their use in the class. We can not isolate these materials from the class where they are mostly developed. In English language teaching a listening class will be more effective if we make use of suitable listening materials. In the last two sections above I covered recorded materials as the current way to bring the target language into the classroom in the natural way. By using listening materials in class students have opportunity to improve their skills through practicing. This may also motivate them to practice other skills. It is important that when teachers teach through listening materials, especially recorded material, they use different listening situations to help students familiarize themselves with the varieties of speech which they will face in real life. Ur (1984) believes that: " When planning listening exercises it is essential to bear in mind the kind of real-life situations for which we are preparing students...(22)." In this aspect the student can not be a passive listener. He/she reacts to what he/she hears around him/her.

### **3.4- Material Conservation and Maintenance**

The conservation of listening materials is fundamental when availability of listening materials is a problem. There are schools where for different reasons teachers do not have access to adequate materials. For example some schools do not have a budget for these materials. Others have the financial conditions but do not have the interest to buy audio materials/equipment. Others provide them but teachers do not keep them in good conditions; they lose or misuse them. When these problems occur it is not possible to teach class as you had planned. Teachers complain about the lack of materials but when they are available to us

it is important to think about their conservation and whenever possible, creating new materials as needed.

It is also suggested that a space be created to store materials. This closet or storage room should be well maintained. Teachers should sign-out materials and be responsible for their return. We also should evaluate them to see what types are best to use.

## **4 – Best Uses for Different Listening Techniques**

There are many different listening techniques available to use in the classroom. Brown (1990) says that “In normal life we have reasons for listening, and interests and purposes which our listening serves (147).” If people listen with a purpose in mind they are more interested in what is going to be said. When we teach listening skills it is essential that we identify the technique that suits the specific communicative purpose. In this chapter I will talk about listening for: general information; specific information; taking notes; imitation or reproduction, and to infer opinion and attitude.

### **4.1- Listening for General Information**

Most of the time listeners pay attention to what is being said with the purpose of getting general information. They listen to get a general idea of the main points given. The listener must be able to listen solely to what is fundamental and to discard what is detailed. The ability to get the general picture from spoken language is often more difficult than from written language (Harmer 1983:190).

#### Suggested Activity:

(1) The teacher asks students to listen to a recorded interview given by the Capeverdean Prime Minister about the problem of energy caused by ELECTRA in Cape Verde. (2) Have the students identify and repeat the general ideas of the interview. In other words they should

identify the most important points of the interview. (3) Have them refer to points like: why the problem exists; what the impact is on the consumer; and what solutions have been identified.

This type of listening activity is suggested for Third Cycle students because they are at an adequate level to distinguish between what is relevant from what is irrelevant information.

## **4.2- Listening for Specific Information**

When the listener is listening for specific information, he/she must discern the important details to be remembered. This means that the listener does not pay overall attention to the whole text but to specific aspects he is interested in. Harmer (1983) states that: “The ability or skill of listening to extract specific information is as important for listening as it is for reading (181).” This may take place inside or outside the classroom. Inside the classroom the teacher’s goal is to simulate a real-life listening to make student become a competent listener in real-life situations.

### Suggested Activity:

(1) The teacher selects a recorded passage about a road accident, for example, in which he explains to student what he/she has to do. (2) The teacher asks students to listen and have students listen carefully to the passage and answer questions like: When did the accident happen?, Were there injured people?, How many deaths were there?, What were the causes of the accident?, and so forth.

Outside the classroom the listener may turn on the radio and listen only for a particular item of news that he/she wants to. With these types of activities the listener disregards the other pieces of information.

## **4.3- Listening for Taking Notes**

Taking notes is another reason for why we listen. When listening to take notes, the listener is not expected to write down long sentences but the most important words. They are called *content words* and can be nouns, verbs, adjectives or adverbs. For good note-

taking it is necessary to listen well. The purpose of taking notes during a lecture, for example, helps the listener to concentrate on what is being said and if he/she is concentrated, he/she is able to select the words he/she needs to write down. According to James *et al.* (1979) “The general principle in note-taking is to reduce the language by shortening words and sentences.” Undoubtedly by shortening words and sentences it is possible to take notes in an efficient way.

Suggested Activity:

- (1) The teacher asks student to listen to an extract of a recorded interview given by the Capeverdean Ministry for Defence concerning to the “NATO OPERATIONS IN CAPE VERDE”.
- (2) Have students listen attentively to the interview and, at the end of the activity, give a summary of the interview from the notes he/she took while listening.

#### **4.4- Listening for Imitation or Reproduction**

When we listen to something we want to imitate what has been said as correctly as possible, then we have to listen very carefully. The listener must be efficient in listening skills to help him/her to repeat exactly words or sentences that he/she hears.

Suggested Activity:

- (1) The teacher tells students that a classmate who is not in the classroom completed seventeen years old today, asks them to sing the song “Happy Birthday” after him/her just repeating what they hear him/her singing.
- (2) Have groups of students sing separately.
- (3) Have the whole class sing together.
- (4) Have them sing “Happy Birthday” from the beginning to the end as soon as the other student comes in the classroom.

#### **4.5 - Listening to Infer Opinion and Attitude**

Sometimes a listener has to listen to a passage and be able to express a speaker’s opinion or attitude. This becomes difficult when the opinion or attitude is not directly stated. It is necessary that the listener has a lot of experience to help him/her gauge whether the speaker approves or disapproves. The listener must pay attention to the speaker’s clues. Interpreting clues is not always easy and therefore this technique is not recommended for first cycle but for third cycle students. Harmer (1993) states that: “The ability to recognize a speaker’s attitude and opinion is of a high level skill and involves the listener’s understanding of the speaker’s register as well as of function he is performing(196).”



Suggested Activity:

The teacher should set up an activity that has students practice this type of listening. (1) Asks student to listen to a certain passage about a secondary school director and parents discussing the theme “*The Permanency of Pregnant Teenagers in Secondary Schools*”. (2) Before listening, teacher gives student a group of statements. (3) After listening has he/she say which statements are true and which ones are false. (4) As a complementary part of the activity students should be asked to justify their opinions based on what they discussed.

Summary:

These techniques are but a few that can be used to practice listening. Teachers should pay close attention to suggested grade level for each activity, if not students will only become frustrated when they can not complete the activity. Be creative and prepare students well before the activity starts. Make sure that all necessary equipment is in good functioning order. Time management is important! Pre-test each activity to know approximately how much time is needed. In case of any doubts always over-estimate your time.

## **5- Recommended ELT Listening Activities**

Listening in ELT, as the other macro- skills, is most effective when the teacher is able to prepare suitable and appropriate listening materials, in addition to listening activities to make students more active during class. In this session I will recommend some listening activities that I think are essential for all ELT listening classes. These activities are: story-telling, drama, dialogue, music, listening to the radio, films and telephone.

### **5.1- Story- telling**

People normally love stories because they contain something of interest. Celce-Murcia and Hilles (1988: 51) state that stories are used in contemporary ESL materials to promote communication and expression in the classroom. This suggests that stories are important, even in the classroom. Thus, when the teacher selects a story to be told it is necessary that he/she has the student's interest in mind.

Listening to a story in the ELT classroom requires on the part of the teller a clear and loud voice, if not the listener may lose interest for the story. The teacher is the first resource that students have in the classroom; therefore the teacher must have the necessary skill to be a good story-teller. This helps students to become effective listeners. A story can be told by the teacher or it can be recorded.

**The following activity is recommended:**

The teacher presents a short story that illustrates a structure - Present Perfect, for example. First, this story may appear to students with blanks. The teacher asks students to listen and complete the story using the *Present Perfect*. Finally have them reconstruct the story and one of them can retell it to the class. Another task that the teacher can add to the activity is to replay the story and ask them comprehension questions. Students naturally like to listen to stories, especially if the theme is interesting. It is good to watch the student's face to check his/her reaction during the telling of the story.

## **5.2- Drama**

Another successful listening activity is drama. Drama permits teachers to match structures and functions when they teach grammar, for example. Dramatic activities are believed to be vital and an effective tool when teaching second- language communication and phonology. Drama can be integrated with role-play and simulation, which makes it even more effective. Johnson and Morrow (1981) state that: " Drama can stimulate the imagination and motivate the student to use and experiment with the language he has already learned (131)." Activities based on drama are helpful because they increase students' motivation, raise their self-esteem, and make them feel integrated. As we can see, these factors are necessary if the teacher wants his students to get more involved in the class, i.e., in the listening-speaking process. A role-playing activity may illustrate this listening-speaking process.

**The following activity is recommended:**

The teacher asks students to work in pairs or small groups. In turns, he/she has each student in the pair or group pick up an imaginary object from the floor but should not say anything. The other classmates can try to guess what the object is. They can ask questions like: "Is it heavy?", "Is it smooth?", " Do you like it?" "Do you have one?", etc. According to the given answers the students may guess what the object is. They can also guess from the gestures the student makes.

## **5.3- Dialogue**

Dialogue can be considered one of the most important activities in practicing listening. It is an active way to practice listening because during this activity the listener has to listen carefully to what the speaker is saying so that he/she can respond to what he/she hears.

Dialogue is a kind of role-playing activity in which the listener and the speaker change roles according to the dialogue's needs. The use of dialogues brings the following advantages:

- .The spoken language is presented directly in the most common situations;
- .The student feels motivated to practice the language;
- .When the teacher uses dialogues in class, students are encouraged to active participation in the lesson.

When the teacher presents a dialogue to students, he/she should think of specific criteria. Byrne (1988:23) suggests the following criteria:

- .The language should be relevant and appropriate;
- .The situation should be realistic and relevant;
- .The dialogue should not be too long;
- .The dialogue should be interesting.

If the dialogue meets these criteria, the student will be motivated to take part in the dialogue. While the student participates in the dialogue he/she learns pronunciation by both listening and speaking.

**The following activity is recommended:**

Teacher must carefully select his/her dialogues according to the student's level and interest. So, the teacher can read the text aloud by him/herself or bring native speakers to the class. Teacher asks students to listen to it attentively. While listening, have students take notes on what they heard from each character and next act it out in pairs, using the same gestures and facial expressions and imitating the same tone of voice. All these elements together help students work more effectively with dialogues.

## **5.4- Listening to Music**

Music is a way through which languages are spread worldwide. Music contributes to enrich the culture of a country because it expresses people's feelings. In Cape Verde many people listen to music/song with English lyrics. There are two types of listeners: those who listen because they have some knowledge of the language and want to improve it and those who have little or no knowledge of the language and want to listen to the music simply for the

fact that the singer's voice is nice or the melody is beautiful. Even a person with no knowledge of English tries to understand the pronunciation of the verses and sings as the music is being played. For example in the 1980's and 1990's Capeverdian young people were very influenced by Bob Marley's Reggae and Michael Jackson's Pop music.

Music normally reflects real life situations and therefore can be very useful in the classroom. According to my questionnaire conducted with teachers and students, both the groups stated that music is an important tool to teach and learn English. Music motivates language learners. When student sings he/she repeats the lyrics. This repetition suggests that he/she is listening attentively. Dubin was cited in Celce-Murcia and Hilles (1988) and stated that: "Songs can be utilized as presentation contexts; reinforcement materials; vehicles through which to teach all language skills; and as a medium through which to present some of the most important cultural themes which pervade modern life (116)."

**The following activity is recommended:**

The teacher chooses a song from a well-known singer that draws the students' attention. Teacher tells students about the theme they are about to listen, then asks students to listen to the song about HIV-AIDS. While listening they write down what they are listening to and next they sing the song following the melody. After that the teacher gives new vocabulary on HIV-AIDS. Students sit in small groups and write a short song that should be sung to the class.

## **5.5- Listening to the Radio**

Radio is a medium that permits us to listen to news, dramas, advertisements, sports, music etc. People have different interests in listening to the radio. When we listen to the radio we have to double our attention because in case we do not understand what is said, there is not a second chance for repetition. However it is fundamental that we focus our attention on the most important words that will provide us an image of what we need to listen to. When we listen to the radio we listen mainly for general understanding. This is discussed in section 4.1. The activities broadcasted on radio require a lot on the part of the student to understand once there is no image just sound to help him/her with comprehension.

The teacher can plan a lesson based on a radio program that will be broadcasted during class time. If it is impossible to do so, the teacher should use a recorded program. With recorded material, the student has the opportunity to listen more than once to understand the activity,

but as soon as he/she familiarizes him/herself with this type of activity he/she should be able to perform a task by listening once or twice. Krashen and Terrell (1988) reinforce this idea by saying that: “Some students will understand the recorded material after two or three repetitions, others may need up to thirty repetitions (154).” Despite what has been said above, it is important to admit that human beings learn differently, so it is normal that sometimes a student needs to listen more than once, especially if he has to listen to the radio. In addition the number of times needed for a listening activity varies from the lowest to the highest level.

**The following activity is recommended:**

Teacher brings the radio to class. Tells students to listen very carefully because there is no chance for a second time. The selected program can be about meteorological information of eight Western European Capitals broadcasted by the BBC. Teacher provides the names of the capitals and have students write down what they are listening. Students should be separated in groups of eight and each member has to give information about heat, wind, sea and sky in each capital. For example “A” members – capital “A”; “B” members – “B” capital, and so forth. After performing the task the teacher asks students to read the notes for the class. It is important that the teacher records the information for any doubts.

## **5.6- Watching films**

Watching films is a demanding yet interesting listening activity. In any listening activity teacher considers student’s level and this aspect may bring success to the ELT class. While student listens to the radio he/she has to make a great level of effort to understand what is being said because he/she only listens to different people speaking but when he/she watches a film the level of effort is less because he/she has a set of images that helps him/her understand what is heard from the characters. Moreover student is able to understand most of the details in the film given that he/she can hear what a character is saying and see how the character expresses him/herself. According to his/her body or facial expressions and tone of voice the character provides the listener better comprehension. When there are visual images the listening activity is more interesting and the student feels more involved in such an activity. Ryan (1998) points out that “Students will often express an interest in using movies as a medium for language learning...” Watching films is not an easy task because our students are not so used to viewing/listening to films but reading the translation in Portuguese. Third cycle students who are expected to have an acceptable language

background should not read translation, just view the film paying attention to the voices. The studies show that most of the students surveyed suggested film as a way to learn English.

**The following activity is recommended:**

The teacher chooses a short romantic film. Tells students that the theme is about a poor boy who intended to marry a rich girl who loved each other very much. Sets pre-listening questions like: *What do you expect to see in the film?*, After answering the pre-questions have they listen to the film , after that teacher sets comprehension questions like: *Did the boy and the girl really get married?*, and have students answer these questions. If the teacher has time he/she could ask students to verbally summarize the film.

## **5.7- Listening on the Telephone**

The telephone is an effective tool for practicing listening. It requires more effort on the part of the listener because there is no face-to-face communication. He/she can not see the speaker's gestures or facial expressions that are helpful in listening comprehension. However, not like the radio, conversation on the telephone can be controlled because the listener can ask for repetition or clarification if h/she does not understand any point. When listening to the radio, for example, the listener has to double his concentration because there is no repetition of misheard words or utterances. It is possible that many students have a mobile phone; therefore they can use them for practicing communication during class.

**The following activity is recommended:**

The teacher gives students a two-minute activity. Have them work in pairs. Teacher tells them they can talk about anything that is interesting for them. For example their conversation can be about what each one did or is going to do on his/her weekend. They can also talk about free times, holidays, football, etc. If there are not enough mobile phones the students can cooperate with the classmates by lending them the phones for a two-minute period. It is necessary that students do not talk with a loud voice. Each one has to listen on the phone.

## **5.8- Overall Recommendations**

These activities were provided to assist teachers in developing their own along these lines. Teachers should look for ways of using and improving these activities taking into consideration the students listening background. It is important to remember that these types of activity may be difficult for some students, mainly when they have to listen to a recorded story, the radio, films, music and the telephone , because the listener does not have a speaker in front of him/her. In order to make these activities attractive to students teachers must carefully choose them before going into the class.

## **6- CONCLUSION**

Throughout this research paper we had analyzed best ways to teaching listening skills and focused on the problems teachers face in the Capeverdian classroom. When there are problems teachers should see the problems as challenges and look for solutions. In today's world English is a language spoken worldwide, so if we want our students to compete we should provide them with strong speaking skills which imply good listening skills.

Listening is not an easy task to teach. It demands a great deal of concentration on the part of the student. Teachers will not give successful listening classes if they do not have appropriate equipment, classroom environment and students motivation and interest. But we must remember that even when the equipment is appropriate it is also necessary to have access to listening materials which should be selected according to students grades and needs. After the teacher has these conditions done he/she has to decide which techniques can be used and which listening activities best help students to learn language in an effective



way. If we teach students according to methodologies we contribute to make of them effective listeners and consequently effective speakers.

This research paper is a kind of teaching tool teachers have at hands that may help them when teaching students through listening. They will find in the work suggestions for how teachers can improve listening skills teaching in Capeverdian classroom.

It is necessary that all teachers be well trained in speaking skills. If listening depends on good pronunciation then it is necessary that we have a good command of pronunciation which will make of the students better listeners. It is also necessary to have a listening laboratory on the school grounds with all necessary conditions for listening classes, more and improved listening equipment like radio, tape-recorder, television, CD player, etc. Teachers themselves need to practice the language with the intent to improve their listening skills as well as other skills. This can be done by practicing language skills in coordination meetings, preparing lessons to be presented to fellow teachers in the coordination meetings for feed-back. Creating study practice habits where students have time to speak “English only”. Listening to music, documentaries and news on the radio and television, talking to native speakers face to face or on the Internet also helps.

Teachers need to participate in exchange programs where Capeverdian teachers can visit every summer an English-speaking country to practice the language and know the Anglo-Saxon cultures. Teachers also need in- service training to retain specific listening skills and creative methodologies. It is very important to gather our efforts in order to make NETA become a strong English teachers association because NETA will work as the English teachers’ voice in Cape Verde.

For colleagues who are interested in this topic I would suggest further research in the following areas:

- 1- The effectiveness of specific listening techniques on different cycle students;
- 2- Creating local resources to teach listening skills

With all this said and done, I believe that teachers will agree that it is possible to improve how listening skills are taught in Capeverdian EFL classrooms in order to produce fluent English speakers. This should be our goals.

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